

THE
Indispensable Necessity
OF THE
KNOWLEDGE
OF THE
HOLY SCRIPTURE
IN ORDER
To MAN's Eternal Salvation and
Ignorance therein;
The Mother of *Idolatry* and *Super-*
stition Asserted
IN A
SERMON;
PREACHED by
JOHN TILLOTSON D.D.
and Dean of *Canterbury*.

MATTHEW. xxiii. 13.

Ye unto you Scribes and Pharisees, Hypocrites; for ye shut up the Kingdom of Heaven against Men, and ye neither go in your selves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in.

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Clarence S. Brigham
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MATTHEW xxiii. 13.

*Woe unto you Scribes and Pharisees, Hypocrites;
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THE Scribes so often mentioned in the Gospel, were the great Doctors among the Jews, the Teachers and Interpreters of the Law of God. And because many of them were of the Sect of the Pharisees, which above all others pretended to skill and knowledge in the Law, therefore it is our blessed Saviour does so often put the Scribes and Pharisees together. And these were the Men of Chief Authority in the Jewish Church; Who equalled their own Unwritten Word and Traditions with the Law of God: Nay, our Saviour tells us, *they made the commandments of God of none effect by their Traditions.* They did in effect assume to themselves infallibility; and all that opposed and contradicted them, they branded with the Odious Name of *Hereticks*. Against these our Saviour denounceth this *Woe* here in the Text, *Woe unto you Scribes and Pharisees, Hypocrites, for ye shut up the Kingdom of Heaven against Men, &c.*

All the Difficulty in the Words is, what is here meant by *shutting up the Kingdom of Heaven against Men*: Luke expresseth it more plainly, *ye have taken away the key of Knowledge, ye entred not into your selves, and them that were entring in, ye hindred.* By putting these two Expressions together, we shall the more easily come at the meaning of the Text. *Ye have taken away the key of Knowledge, and have shut up the Kingdom of Heaven against Men.* This Metaphor of the key

Knowledge is undoubtedly an Allusion to that known Custom among the *Jews* in the admission of their Doctors. For to whomsoever they gave Authority to interpret the Law and the Prophets, they were solemnly admitted into that Office by delivering to them a *Key* and a *Table-book*. So that by the *key of knowledge* is here meant the Interpretation and understanding of the Scriptures; and by *taking away the key of Knowledge*, not only that they arrogated to themselves alone the Understanding of the Scriptures, but likewise that they had Conveyed away this key of Knowledge, and as it were hid it out of the way, neither using it themselves as they ought, nor suffering Others to make use of it.

And thus they *Shut the Kingdom of Heaven against Men*: which is very fitly said of those who have locked the Door against them that were going in, and have taken away the key. By all which it appears that the Plain meaning of our *Saviour* in these Metaphorical Expressions is, that the *Scribes* and Teachers of the Law, under a Pretence of Interpreting the Scriptures, had perverted them and kept the true Knowledge of them from the People: Especially those Old Prophecies of the *Old Testament* which concerned the *Messiah*. And by this means the Kingdom of Heaven was shut against Men: And they not only rejected the Truth themselves but by keeping Men in Ignorance of the true meaning of the Scriptures, they hindered Many from embracing our *Saviour's* Doctrine, and entering into the Kingdom of Heaven, who were otherwise well enough disposed for it.

Having thus Explained the Words, I shall from the main Scope and Design of them observe to you these two things.

I. The necessity of the Knowledge of the holy Scriptures in order to our Eternal Salvation. It is called by our *Saviour* the *key of Knowledge*, that which lets Men into the Kingdom of Heaven.

II. The great and inexcusable fault of those who deprive the People of the Knowledge of the Holy Scriptures. They *shut the Kingdom of Heaven against Men*

and do what in them lies to hinder their Eternal Salvation; and therefore our *Saviour* denounceth so heavy a *Woe* against them.

I shall speak briefly to these two *Observations*; and then apply them to those who are principally concerned in them.

1. *First, I observe hence the Necessity of the knowledge of the holy Scriptures in order to our Eternal Salvation.* This is by our *Saviour* called *the key of knowledge*, that which lets Men into the Kingdom of Heaven.

Knowledge is necessary to Religion: It is necessary to the being of it; and necessary to the life and practice of it. *Without Faith* (says the *Apostle*) *it is impossible to please God*: Because Faith is an act of the Understanding, and does necessarily suppose some knowledge and apprehension of what we believe. To all acts of Religion there is necessarily required some act of the Understanding; so that without Knowledge there can be no Devotion in the Service of God, no Obedience to his Laws. Religion begins in the Understanding, and from thence descends upon the heart and life, *If ye know these things*, (says our *Saviour*) *happy are ye if ye do them.* We must first know God before we can worship him; and understand what is his Will, before we can do it.

This is so very evident, that one would think there needed no Discourse about it: And yet there are some in the World that cry up Ignorance as the Mother of Devotion. And to shew that we do not wrong them in this matter, Mr. *Rushworth* in his *Dialogues* (a Book in great vogue among the *Papists* here in *England*) does expressly reckon up Ignorance among the *Parents of Religion*. And can any thing be said more absurdly and more to the Disparagement of Religion, than to derive the Pedigree of the most excellent thing in the World; from so obscure and ignoble an Original; and to make that which the Scripture calls *the beginning of Wisdom*, and *the Excellency of Knowledge*, to be the Off-spring of Ignorance, and a Child of Darkness? Ignorance indeed may be the cause of Wonder and Admiration, and the Mother of Folly and Super-

stitution: But surely Religion is of a nobler Extraction, and is the Issue and Result of the best Wisdom and Knowledge; and descends from above, from the giver of every good and perfect Gift, even the Father of Lights.

And as Knowledge in general is necessary to Religion, so more particularly, the knowledge of the *Holy Scriptures* is necessary to our Eternal Salvation. Because these are the great and standing Revelations of God to Mankind; wherein the Nature of God and his Will concerning our Duty, and the Terms and Conditions of our Eternal Happiness in another World, are fully and plainly declared to us.

The Scriptures are the Word of God; and from whence can we learn the Will of God so well as from his own Mouth? They are the great Instruments of our Salvation; and should not every Man be acquainted with that, which alone can perfectly instruct him what he must believe, and what he must do that he may be saved? This is the Testimony which the Scripture gives of it self, that it is able to make Men wise unto Salvation; and is it not very fit that every Man should have this Wisdom, and in order thereunto the free use of that *Book* from whence this Wisdom is to be learned?

Secondly, I observe the great and inexcusable fault of those who keep Men in Ignorance of Religion, and take away from them so excellent and necessary means of Divine Knowledge, as the *Holy Scriptures* are. This our Saviour calls *taking away the Key of Knowledge, and shutting the Kingdom of Heaven against Men*. That is, doing what in them lies to render it impossible for Men to be saved. For this he denounceth a terrible woe against the Teachers of the *Jewish Church* though they did not proceed so far as to deprive Men of the use of the *Holy Scriptures*, but only of the right Knowledge and Understanding of them. This alone is a horrible Impiety, to lead Men into a false sense and interpretation of Scripture; but much greater to forbid them the reading of it. This is a stop to knowledge

at the very fountain head ; and not only to lead Men into Errour, but to take away from them all possibility of rectifying their mistakes. And can there be a greater Sacrilege, than to rob Men of the Word of God, the best means in the World of acquainting them with the Will of God and their Duty, and the way to Eternal Happiness? To keep the People in Ignorance of that which is necessary to save them, *is to judge them unworthy of Eternal Life*, and to declare it does not belong to them, and maliciously to contrive the Eternal ruine and destruction of their Souls.

To lock up the *Scriptures* and the *Service of God* from the People in an Unknown Tongue, what is this but in effect to forbid Men to know God, and to serve him ; to render them incapable of knowing what *is the good and acceptable Will of God* ; of joyning in his Worship, or performing any Part of it, or receiving any Benefit or Edification from it? And what is, if this be not, *to shut the Kingdom of Heaven against Men*? This is so outrageous a Cruelty to the Souls of Men, that it is not to be excused upon any Pretence whatsoever : This is to take the surest and most effectual way in the World *to destroy those for whom Christ dyed*, and directly to thwart the Great Design of God our Saviour, *Who would have all Men to be Saved, and to come to the Knowledge of the Truth*. Men may miscarry with their Knowledge, but they are sure to perish for the want of it.

The best things in the World have their inconveniences attending them, and are liable to be abused ; but surely Men are not to be ruined and damned for fear of abusing their Knowledge, or for the Prevention of any other inconvenience whatsoever. Besides, this is to cross the very end of the *Scriptures*, and the design of God in inspiring Men to write them. Can any Man think that God should send this great Light of his Word, into the World, for the Priests *to hide it under a Bushel* ; and not rather that it should be set up to the greatest advantage for the Enlightning of the World? *St. Paul* tells us, *Rom. 15. 4.* That *whatsoever things*

were written; were Written for our Learning, that we through Patience and Comfort of the Scriptures might have hope. And 2 Tim. 3. 16. That all Scripture is given by the Inspiration of God; and is profitable for Doctrine, for Reproof, for Correction, for Instruction in Righteousness. And if the Scriptures were Written for these Ends, can any Man have the face to pretend that they do not concern the People, as well as their Teachers. Nay St. Paul expressly tells the Church of Rome, that they were Written for their Learning, however it happens, that they are not now permitted to make use of them. Are the Scriptures so useful and profitable for Doctrine, for Reproof, for Instruction in Righteousness? And why may they not be used by the People for those Ends for which they were given? 'Tis true indeed they are fit for the most knowing and Learned, and sufficient to make the Man of God Perfect, and thoroughly furnished to every good Work (as the Apostle there tells us.) But does this exclude their being profitable also to the People; who may reasonably be presumed to stand much more in need of all means and helps of Instruction than their Teachers: And though there be many difficulties and obscurities in the Scriptures, enough to exercise the Skill and Will of the Learned, yet are they not therefore either useless or dangerous to the People. The Ancient Fathers of the Church were of another mind, St. Chrysostome tells us that, *Whatever things are necessary, are manifest in the Scriptures.* And St. Austin, that all things are plain in the Scripture, which concerns Faith and a good Life, and that those things which are necessary to the Salvation of Men, are not so hard to become at, but that as to those things which the Scripture plainly contains, it speaks without disguise like a familiar friend to the hearts of the Learned and Unlearned. And upon these and such like considerations, the Fathers did every where in their Orations and Homilies charge and exhort the People to be conversant in the Holy Scriptures, to read them daily and diligently, and attentively. And I challenge our Adversaries, to shew me where any of the ancient Fathers do discourage the People from reading the Scriptures.

much less forbid them so to do. So that they who do it now have no cloak for their Sin: And they who pretend so confidently to *Antiquity* in other cases, are by the Evidence of Truth forced to acknowledge, that it is against them in this. Though they have Ten Thousand *Schoolmen* on their side, yet have they not one *Father*, not the least pretence of Scripture, or rag of *Antiquity* to cover their nakedness in this Point.

With great reason then does our *Saviour* denounce so heavy a *Woe* against such Teachers; of old in the like case God by his *Prophets* severely threatens the Priests of the *Jewish* Church, for not instructing the People in the Knowledge of God, *Hosea* 4. 6. *My People are destroyed for lack of Knowledge; because thou hast rejected Knowledge, I will also reject thee; thou shalt be no more a Priest to me: Seeing thou hast forgotten the Law of thy God, I will also forget thy Children.* God, you see, lays the ruine of so many Souls at their Doors, and will require their Blood at their hands. So many as perish for want of Knowledge, and Eternally miscarry by being deprived of the necessary means of Salvation, their Destruction shall be charged upon those who have taken away the Key of Knowledge, and shut the Kingdom of Heaven against Men.

And it is just with God to punish such Persons not only as the Occasion, but as the Authors of this Ruine. For who can judge otherwise, but that they who deprive Men of the necessary means to any End, do purposely design to hinder them of attaining that End. And whatever may be pretended in this Case; to deprive Men of the *Holy Scriptures*, and to keep them ignorant of the service of God, and yet while they do so, to make a shew of an earnest desire of their Salvation, is just such a mockery, as if one of you that is a Master, should tell his Apprentice how much you desire he should thrive in the World, and be a Rich Man; but all the while keeps him ignorant of his Trade in order to his being Rich; and with the strictest care imaginable, conceals from him the best means of Learning, that whereby alone he is likely to thrive and get an

Estimate.

(8)
Estate. *Woe unto you Scribes, Pharisees, and Hypocrites.*

By what hath been discoursed upon this Argument, you will easily perceive where the Application is like to fall. For the *Woe* denounced by our *Saviour* here in the *Text* against the *Scribes* and *Pharisees*, falls every whit as heavy upon the *Pastours* and *Teachers* of the *Roman Church*. They have taken away the *Key of Knowledge* with a *Witness*; not only depriving the *People* of the right Understanding of the *Scriptures*, but of the very use of them: As if they were afraid they should understand them, that they dare not suffer them so much, as to be acquainted with them.

This Tyranny that Church hath Exercised over those of her Communion for several Hundreds of Years. It grew upon them indeed by degrees, for as by the Inundation of *Barbarous Nations* upon the *Roman Empire*, the *Romans* bought their Language by degrees, so the Governours of that Church still kept up the *Scriptures* and the Service of God in the *Latin Tongue*, which at last was wholly unknown to the Common People. And about the *Ninth* and *Tenth Centuries*, when by the general Consent of all their own *Historians*, gross Darknes and Ignorance covered this part of the World, the *Pope* and the *Priests* took away the *Key of Knowledge*, and did (as I may so say) put it under the Door for several Ages; till the *Reformation* fetcht it out again, and rubbed off the Rust of it.

And I profess seriously, that hardly any thing in the World was ever to me more astonishing, than this Uncharitable and Cruel usage of the People in the Church of *Rome*. And I cannot tell which to wonder at most, the Insolence of their Governours in imposing upon Men this senseless way of serving God, or the patience shall I call it, or rather stupidity of the People in enduring to be so intollerably abused. Why should reasonable Creatures be treated at this rude and barbarous rate? As if they were Unworthy to be acquainted with the Will of God; and as if that which every Man ought to do, were not fit for every Man to know: As if the Com-

mon People had only Bodies to be present at the service of God, but no Souls; or as if they were all distracted and out of their Wits, and it were a dangerous thing to let in the Lights upon them.

But to speak more distinctly. There are *two* things we charge them withal, and which they are not able to deny. Their performing the *Publick Service of God* in an Unknown Tongue; and depriving the People of the use of the *Scriptures*. And I shall first tell you what we have to say against these things, and then consider what they pretend for them.

1. As for their performing the service of God in a Tongue Unknown to the People. And I begin with *St. Paul*, who in his first Epistle to the *Corinthians* hath a whole Chapter on purpose to shew the unreasonableness of this thing, and how contrary it is to the Edification of *Christians*. His Discourse is so plain and so well known, that I shall not particularly insist upon it. *Erasmus* in his Annotations upon this Chapter, breaks out (as well he might) into admiration at the Church of *Rome* in his time. *Hâc in re mirum quam mutata sit Ecclesie consuetudo: It is Wonderful,* (says he) *how the Custom of the Church is altered in this matter.* *St. Paul* had rather speak five Words with Understanding, and so as to teach others, than Ten Thousand in an Unknown Tongue. Why does the Church doubt to follow so great an Authority, or rather how dares she to dissent from it?

As for the practice of the Ancient Church, let *Origen* bear Witness, *The Grecians* (saith he) *in their Prayers use the Greek, and the Romans the Latin Tongue; and so every one according to his Language prayeth unto God, and praiseth him as he is able.*

And not only in *Origen's* time, but for more than Six Hundred Years, the Service of God was always performed in a known Tongue. And this the Learned Men of their own Church do not deny. And Cardinal *Cajetan* (as *Cassander* tells us) said it was much better this custom were restored; and being reprov'd for saying so, he said, he Learned it from *St. Paul*. And *Bellarmino* himself confesseth that the *Armenians, Egyptians,*
Arabi-

Ethiopians, Russians, and others do use their own Language in their Liturgies at this day.

But it is otherwise now in the Church of *Rome*, and hath been for several Ages. And it seems they lay great stress upon it, not only as a thing of great use, but necessity. For Pope *Gregory* the Seventh, forbids the Prince of *Bohemia*, to permit to the People the Celebration of Divine Offices in the *Sclavonian Tongue*; and commands him to oppose them herein with all his forces. It seems he thought it a Cause worthy the fighting for; and that it were much better the People should be Killed, than suffered to understand their Prayers.

But let us reason this matter a little calmly with them. Is it necessary for Men to understand any thing they do in Religion? And is not Prayer one of the most solemn Parts of Religion: And why then should not Men understand their Prayers as well as any thing else they do in Religion? Is it good that People should understand their private Prayers? that (we thank them) they allow, and why not the publick as well? Is there less of Religion in publick Prayers? Is God less honoured by them? Or are we not as capable of being Edified and of having our hearts and affections moved and incited by them? Where then lies the Difference? The more I consider it, the more I am at a loss what tolerable reason any Man can give why People should not understand their publick Devotions as well as their private. If Men cannot heartily and devoutly pray alone, without understanding what they ask of God, no more (say I) can they heartily and devoutly join in the publick Prayers which are made by the Priest without understanding what they are: If it be enough for the Priest to understand them, why should not the Priest only be present at them? Unless the People do not meet to worship God, but only to wait upon the Priest. But by saying that the Priest understands 'em, it seems it is better that some body should understand them than not; and why is not that which is good for the Priest good for the People.

So that the true state of the *Controversy* is, whether it be

be fit that the People should be Edified in the Service of God; and whether it be fit that the Church should order things contrary to Edification? For it is plain that the Service of God in an unknown Tongue, is useless and unprofitable to the People: Nay, it is evidently no publick Service of God when the Priest only understands it. For how can they be said to be publick Prayers if the People do not join in them? and how can they join in that they do not understand? and to what purpose are *Lessons of Scripture* read, if People are to learn nothing by them? and how should they learn when they do not understand? This is as if one should pretend to teach a Man *Greek* by reading him *Lectures* every day out of an *Arabick* and *Persian* Book, of which he understands not one syllable.

As to their depriving the People of the use of the *Holy Scriptures*; our Blessed Saviour exhorts the *Jews* to search the *Scriptures*: And St. Paul chargeth the *Christians* that the Word of God should dwell richly in them. And the ancient *Fathers* of the Church do most frequently and earnestly recommend to the People the reading and study of the *Scriptures*. How comes the Case now to be so altered? Sure the Word of God is not changed, that certainly abides and continues the same for ever.

I shall by and by examine what the Church of *Rome* pretends in excuse of this Sacrilege. In the mean time, I do not see what considerable Objections can be made against the reading of the *Scriptures*, which would not have held as well against the writing and publishing them in a Language understood by the People; as the *Old Testament* was by the *Jews*, and the *Epistles* of the Apostles by the *Churches* to whom they were written; and the *Gospel* both by *Jews* and *Greeks*. Were there no difficulties and obscurities then in the *Scriptures*, capable of being wrested by the Unstable and unlearned? Were not People then liable to Errour, and was there no danger of *Heresy* in those Times? And yet these are their great Objections against putting the *Scriptures* into the hands

hands of the People ; which is just like their arguing against giuing the Cup to the *Laiety* from the inconvenience of their *Beards*, least some of the Consecrated Wine should be spilt upon them : As if *Errours* and *Beards* were Inconveniences lately sprung up in the World, and which Mankind were not liable to in the first Ages of *Christianity*.

But if there were the same dangers and inconveniences in all Ages, this Reason makes against the Publishing of the Scriptures to the People at first, as much as against permitting them the use of them now. And in truth, all these Objections are against the Scripture it self : and that which the Church of *Rome* would find fault with if they durst, is, that there should be any such Book in the World, and that it should be in any bodies hands, learned or unlearned ; for if it be dangerous to any, none are so capable of doing mischief with it as Men of Wit and Learning. So that at the bottom, if they would speak out, the Quarrel is against the Scriptures themselves. This is too evident by the Counsel given to Pope *Julius* the Third by the Bishops met at *Bononia* to consult about the Establishment of the *Roman See* ; where, among other things, they give this as their last advice, and as the greatest and weightiest of all, *That by all means, as little of the Gospel as might be, especially in the vulgar Tongue, should be read to the People, and that little which was in the Mass ought to be sufficient ; neither should it be permitted to any Mortal to read more. For so long (say they) as Men were contented with that little, all things went well with them, but quite otherwise since more was commonly read. And speaking of the Scripture, they give this remarkable testimony and commendation of it ; This in short is that Book, which above all others, hath raised those Tempests and Whirlwinds which we were almost carried away with. And in truth, if any one diligently considers it, and compares it with what is done in our Church, he will find them very contrary to each other, and our Doctrine not only to be very different from it, but repugnant to it. If this be the Case, they do like the*
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rest of the Children of this World, prudently enough in their Generation : Can we blame them for being against the Scriptures, when the Scriptures are acknowledged to be so clearly against them ? But surely no body that considereth these things, would be of that Church, which is brought by the undeniable evidence of the things themselves to this shameful Confession, that several of their Doctrines and Practices are very contrary to the Word of God.

Much more might have been said against the Practice of the Church of Rome in these two particulars, but this is sufficient.

I shall in the second place consider what is pretended for them : And indeed, what can be pretended in justification of so contumelious an affront to Mankind, so great a tyranny and cruelty to the Souls of Men ? Hath God forbidden the People to look into the Scriptures ? No, quite contrary : Was it the Practice of the Antient Church to lay this restraint upon Men, or to celebrate the Service of God in an unknown Tongue ? Our Adversaries themselves have not the face to pretend this. I shall truly represent the substance of what they say in these two points.

As to the Service of God in an unknown Tongue, they say these four things for themselves.

First, That the People do exercise a general Devotion, and come with an intention to serve God, and that is accepted, though they do not particularly understand the Prayers that are made, and the Lessons that are read.

But is this all that is intended in the Service of God ? does not St. Paul expressly require more ? *That the Understanding of the People should be Edified by the particular Service that is performed* : And if what is done be not particularly understood, he tells us the People are not Edified, nor can say Amen to the Prayers and Thanksgivings that are put up to God : And that any Man that should come in and find People serving of God in this unprofitable and unreasonable manner, would conclude that they were mad.

And if there be any general Devotion in the People, it is because they understand in general what they are about ; and why may they not as well understand the particular Service that is performed, that so they might exercise a particular Devotion: So that they are devout no further than they understand ; and consequently, as to what they do not understand, had every whit as good be absent.

Secondly, They say, the Prayers are to God, and he understands them, and that is enough.

But what harm were it, if all they that pray understood it also : Or indeed, how can men pray to God without understanding what they ask of him ? Is not Prayer a part of the *Christian* Worship ? and is any Service reasonable that is not directed by our Understandings, and accompanied with our Hearts and Affections ?

But then what say they to the *Lessons* and *Exhortations* of Scripture, which are likewise read to the People in an unknown Tongue ? Are these directed to God, or to the People only ? And are they not designed by God for their Instruction, and read either to that purpose, or to none ? And is it possible to instruct Men by what they do not understand ? This is a new and wonderful way of Teaching, by concealing from the People the things which they should learn. Is it not all one, as to all purposes of Edification, as if the Scriptures were not read, or any thing else in the place of them ? As they many times do their *Legends*, which the wiser sort among them do not believe when they read them. For all things are alike to them that understand none, as all things are of a colour in the dark. Ignorance knows no difference of things, it is only Knowledge that can distinguish.

Thirdly, They say that some do, at least in some measure, understand the particular Prayers.

If they do, that is no thanks to them : It is by accident if they are more knowing than the rest, and more than the Church either desires or intends. For, if

if they desired it, they might order their Service so as every man might understand it.

Fourthly, They say that 'tis convenient that God should be served and worshipped in the same Language all the World over.

Convenient for them, for God, or for the People? Not for God surely, for he understands all other Languages as well as *Latin*; and for any thing we know to the contrary, likes them as well. And certainly it cannot be so convenient for the People, because they generally understand no Language but their own; and it is very inconvenient they should not understand what they do in the Service of God. But perhaps they mean, that it is convenient for the *Roman Church* to have it so; because this will look like an Argument that they are the *Catholick* or *Universal Church*, when the Language which was originally theirs, shall be the universal Language in which all Nations shall serve God; and by this means also they may bring all Nations to be of their Religion, and yet make them never the wiser: And this is a very great Convenience, because Knowledge is a troublesome thing, and Ignorance very quiet and peaceable, rendring Men fit to be governed, and unfit to dispute.

Secondly, As to their depriving the People of the Scriptures, the summ of what they say may be reduced to these three Heads.

First, That the Church can give men leave to read the Scriptures; but this not without great trouble and difficulty, there must be a License for it under the hand of the Bishop or Inquisitor, by the advice of the Priest and Confessor concerning the fitness of the Person that desires this Priviledge. And we may be sure they will think none fit but those of whom they have the greatest confidence and security; and whoever presumes to do it otherwise, is to be denied *Absolution*; which is as much as in them lies, to damn Men for presuming to read the Word of God without their leave.

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And whatever they may allow here in *England*, where they hold their People upon more slippery Terms, yet this Priviledge is very rarely granted where they are in full possession of their Power, and have the People perfectly under their Yoke.

Secondly, They tell us they instruct the People otherwise. This indeed were something if they did it to purpose, but generally they do it very sparingly and slightly. Their Sermons are commonly made up of feigned Stories and Miracles of Saints, and exhortations to the Worship of them (and especially of the Blessed *Virgin*) and of their Images and Relicks. And for the Truth of this I appeal to the innumerable Volumes of their *Sermons* and *Postils* in Print; which I suppose are none of their worst. I am sure *Erasmus* says, that in his time, in several Countries, the People did scarce once in half a Year hear a profitable Sermon to exhort them to true Piety. Indeed they allow the People some *Catechisms* and *Manuals* of Devotion; and yet in many of them they have the confidence and the conscience to *steal away the Second Commandment* in the face of the *Eighth*.

But to bring the matter to a point, if those helps of Instruction are agreeable to the Scriptures, why are they so afraid the People should read the Scriptures? If they are not, why do they deceive and delude them?

Thirdly, They say, That People are apt to wrest the Scriptures to their own destruction, and that the promiscuous use of them hath been the great occasion of *Heresies*. It cannot be denied to be the condition of the very best things in the World, that they are liable to be abused; Health, Light, and Liberty, as well as Knowledge: But must all those be therefore taken away? This very Inconvenience of Peoples wresting the Scriptures to their own Ruine, *St. Peter* takes notice of in his days: But he does not therefore forbid Men the reading of them as his more prudent Successors have done since. Suppose the reading of the Scriptures hath been the occasion
of

of *Heresies*, were there ever more than in the *first* Ages of *Christianity* : And yet neither the *Apostles* nor their *Successors* ever prescribed this Remedy. But are they in earnest ? Must not Men know the Truth for fear of falling into Errour ? Because Men may possibly miss their way at Noon-day, must they never travel but in the Night when they are sure to lose it.

And when all is done, this is not true, that *Heresies* have sprung from this Cause. They have generally been broached by the Learned, from whom the *Scriptures* neither were nor could be concealed. And for this I appeal to the History and Experience of all Ages. I am well assured the ancient Fathers were of another mind. *St. Chrysostome* says, if Men would be *Conversant* in the *Scriptures*, and attend to them, they would not only not fall into Errors themselves, but rescue those that are deceived : And *St. Hierome* more expressly to our purpose. Thus infinite Evils arise from the Ignorance of the *Scriptures* ; and that from that Cause the most part of most part of *Heresies* have come.

But if what they say were true, is not this to lay the blame of all the ancient *Heresies* upon the ill management of things by our *Saviour* and his *Apostles*, and the *Holy Fathers* of the Church for so many Ages, and their imprudent dispensing of the *Scriptures* to the People. This indeed is to charge the matter home ; and yet this Consequence is unavoidable. For the Church of *Rome* cannot justify the Piety and Prudence of their present Practices, without accusing all these.

But the thing which they mainly rely upon as to both these practices in this. That though these things were otherwise in the *Apostles* times, and in the *Ancient Church*, yet the Church hath power to alter them according to the Exigence and Circumstances of times. I have purposely reserved this for the last place, because it is their last refuge ; and if this fail them they are gone.

To shew the Weakness of this Pretence, we will, if they please, take it for granted, that the *Governors* of

the Church have in no Age more Power, than the Apostles had in theirs. Now St. Paul tells us, 2 Cor. 10. 8. that the Authority which the Apostles had given them from the Lord, was only for *Edification*, but not for *De-struction*: And the same St. Paul makes it the business of a whole *Chapter* to shew that the performing the Publick service of God and particularly praying in an unknown Tongue, are contrary to Edification; from which premises the Conclusion is plain, that the *Apostles* themselves had no Authority to appoint the Service of God to be performed in an unknown Tongue; and surely it is Arrogance for the Church in any Age to pretend to greater Authority than the Apostles had.

This is the Summ of what our *Adversaries* say in justification of themselves in these Points. And there is no doubt, but that Men of Wit and Confidence will always make a shift to say something for any thing; and some way or other blanch over the blackest and most absurd things in the World. But I leave it to the Judgement of Mankind, whether any thing be more unreasonable than to tell Men in effect, that it is fit they should understand as little of Religion as is possible; that God hath published a very dangerous Book, with which it is not safe for the People to be familiarly acquainted; that our Blessed Saviour and his *Apostles* and the ancient *Christian* Church, for more than Six hundred Years, were not wise Managers of Religion, nor prudent Dispensers of the Scriptures, but like fond and foolish Fathers put a Knife and a Sword into the hands of their Children, with which they might have easily fore-seen what mischief they would do to themselves and others. And who would not chuse to be of such a Church which is provided of such excellent and effectual means of Ignorance, such wise and infallible Methods for the prevention of Knowledge in the People, and such variety of close Shutters to keep out the Light.

I have chosen to insist upon this Argument, because it is so very plain, that the most ordinary Capacity may judge of this usage and dealing with the Souls of Men:

Which

Which is so very gross that every Man must needs be sensible of it; because it toucheth Men in the common Rights of humane Nature, which belong to them as much as the Light of Heaven, and the Air we breath in.

It requires no subtilty of Wit, no skill in Antiquity, to understand these Controversies between us and the Church of *Rome*. For there are no Fathers to be pretended on both sides in these Questions: They yield we have Antiquity on ours: And we refer it to the common Sense of Mankind, which Church, that of *Rome*, or *Ours*, hath all the Right or Reason in the World on her side in these Debates? And, who they are that tyrannize over Christians, the Governours of *their* Church or *ours*; Who use the People like Sons and Freemen, and who like Slaves; Who feed the Flock of *Christ* committed to them, and who take the Childrens bread from them? Who they are, that when their Children ask bread, for Bread give them a Stone, and for an Egg a Serpent; I mean the *Legends* of their *Saints* instead of the holy *Scriptures*, which are able to make Men wise unto Salvation: And who they are that lie most justly under the suspicion of Errors and Corruptions, they who bring their Doctrine and Practices into the open Light, and are willing to have them tried by the true Touchstone, the *Word of God*; or they who shun the Light, and decline all manner of Trial and Examination? And who are most likely to carry on a Worldly Design, they who drive a Trade of such mighty gain, and advantage under pretence of Religion, and make such markets of the Ignorance and Sins of the People; or we whom Malice it self cannot charge with serving any Worldly Design by any allowed Doctrine or Practice of our Religion? For we make no Money of the mistakes of the People, nor do we fill their heads with vain fears of New Places of Torment to make them willing to empty their Purfes in a vainer hope of being delivered out of them. We do not like them pretend a mighty banck of Treasure and Merits in the Church, which they sell to the People for ready money.

money, giving them Bills of Exchange from the *Pope* to *Purgatory*; When they who grant them, have no reason to believe they will avail them, or be accepted in the other World.

For our parts we have no fear that our People should understand Religion too well: We could wish, with *Moses*, that all the Lord's People were Prophets: We should be heartily glad the People would read the Holy Scriptures more diligently, being sufficiently assured that it is their own fault if they learn any thing but what is good from thence: We have no Doctrines or Practices contrary to Scripture, and consequently no occasion to keep it close from the sight of the People, or to hide any of the Commandments of God from them: We leave these mean Arts to those who stand in need of them.

In a word, there is nothing which God hath said to Men, which we desire should be concealed from them: Nay, we are willing the People should examine what we teach, and bring all our Doctrines to the Law and to the Testimony; that if they be not according to this Rule, they may neither believe them nor us. 'Tis only things false and adulterate which shun the Light and fear the Touchstone. We have that security of the Truth of our Religion, and of the agreeableness of it to the Word of God; that honest Confidence of the Goodness of our Cause, that we do not forbid the People to read the best Books our Adversaries can write against it.

And now let any Impartial Man judge whether this be not a better Argument of a good Cause, to leave Men at liberty to try the Grounds of their Religion, than the Courses which are taken in the Church of Rome, to awe Men with an Inquisition; and, as much as is possible, to keep the common People in Ignorance, not only of what their late Adversaries, the *Protestants*, but their chief and ancient Adversary, the Scriptures have to say against them.

A Man had need of more than common Security of the Skill and Integrity of those to whom he perfectly resigns his Understanding; this is too great a Trust to be reposed in humane frailty, and too strong a Tempta-

tion to others to impose upon us ; to abuse our Blindness, and to make their own ends of our voluntary Ignorance and easie Credulity. This is such a folly as if a Rich Man should make his Physician his Heir ; which is to tempt him either to destroy him or to let him dye, for his own Interest. So he that trusts the care of his Soul with other Men, and at the same time by *irrecoverable Deed* settles his Understanding upon them, lays too great a Temptation before them to seduce and damn him for their own ends.

And now to reflect a little upon our selves. What cause have we to bless God who are so happily rescued from that more than *Aegyptian* Darknes and Bondage, wherein this Nation was detained for several Ages ; Who are delivered out of the hands of those Cruel Task-masters, who required Brick without Straw ; that Men should be Religious without competent Understanding, and work out their own Salvation while they denied them the means of all others the most necessary to it. Who are so uncharitable as to allow us no Salvation out of their Church, and yet so unreasonable as to deny us the very best means of Salvation when we are in it ?

Our Forefathers thought it a mighty Priviledge to have the Word of God restored to them, and the publick Prayers and Service of God celebrated in a known Tongue : Let us use this inestimable Priviledge with great modesty and humility ; not to the nourishing of Pride and Self-conceit, of Division and Faction ; but as the *Apostle* exhorts, *Let the Word of God dwell richly in you, in all Wisdom ; and let the Peace of God rule in your hearts, unto which ye are called in one body ; and be ye thankful.*

It concerns us mightily (with which Admonition I conclude) both for the Honour and Support of our Religion, to be at better Union among our selves, and not to divide about lesser things : And so to demean our selves, as to take from our Adversaries all those Pretences whereby they would justify themselves, or at least Extenuate the Guilt of that heavy Charge, which

falls every whit as justly upon them as ever it did upon the Scribes and Pharisees, of taking away the key of Knowledge, and shutting the Kingdom of Heaven against Men; neither going in themselves, nor suffering those that are entering to go in.

F I N I S.

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